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SUSSEX POEMS*

By BENNETT WEAVER

To A. T. W.

I

From Sussex town the railroads run
Straight east and west to either sun;
A man may take which one he will
And travel it to suit his fill.

And that is why, in Sussex town
I choose to stay and sit me down;
For since the roads lead either way,
One's choice were just as well to stay.

II

The house I built is very small,
With three rooms plainly set;
But here I can remember all,
And here I can forget.

The place I builded in is far
From where the roadways run;
But here shines every distant star
And here sinks every sun.

*Sussex, Wisconsin, the birthplace of the author.

The dark hills lie to left and right,
Before me and behind;—
My candle gives sufficient light
To satisfy my mind.

And if I wish to walk without
Upon my gray stepstone,
I hear the brown owl talk and shout,
And feel no bit alone.

It were most hard to understand
How this could comfort me,
Had I not hunted every land
And fled through every sea.

III

a

Close along the marshland
With their feet in misty weirs,
Huddling strange and silently
Come marching on the years.

There a hood with moon-stroke
Bows and turns and wags,
There a shoulder with the wind-touch
Breaks the line and sags.

Up across the marshland,
In along the bog,
Crowding close the weir men come
Stepping in the fog.

b

Dark the midnight cedar —
How dark the midnight pine!
Dark the house upon the marshland,
The house that once was mine.

Ninety lengths of summer,
And of winter though it grieves;
And now the moan of moon-wind blown
Hollow round the eaves.

No step now in the ten rooms,
No weeping, laughter, fears:
Who has put the ten lights out?
No one but the years.

IV

This old bridge is too broken
To walk in hidden moon;
The wind will press the cloud on
And all be lighter soon.

Listen! How young the water
That frets at the flagstone piers!
The old bridge may be broken,
But the water has no years.

And he who laid the planking
Along each rock-set beam,
Has slept for many summers
Beside a deeper stream.

The bridge outlasts the builder;
And what is strange to say,
The thing that's builded over
Outlasts them both for aye.

There leaping from the cloud fringe
You see the broad marshland.—
Now, if you will, we cross it;
It's best you hold my hand.

V

I hear the Sussex waters run
From Sussex town to mill,
And think how many times the sun
Has set on Sussex hill.

The eldest town I think indeed
That ever stood on earth,
Where ever men knew church and creed
And book and bell and birth.

And yet to watch the waters go
Through cress and moss and stone,
A man might stand and never know
But that he stood alone.

A man might stand for half a day
And not surmise or dream
A thousand separate lovers lay
Asleep by Sussex stream.

VI

There is a time of twilight
Soft and very still,
No star upon the evening
Frail above the hill.

And there is such a quiet
Close within my breast:
No hope gone or coming,
Only strange rest.

VII

From Sussex town to Lannon
There's many a window pane
That cups the blood of sunset
And spills it out again.

But half the houses surely
Are empty as the wind;
And the other half are shelters
For old folk weak of mind.

They look along the marshes,
They sit beside the door
And think of things that are not
And never will be more.

Which houses are most empty?
Go ask them. They will tell,
Not those which winds inhabit,
But those in which folk dwell.

VIII

He came and stood beside my door,
His fingers lean and glittering;
He did not touch the knob, and yet
I knew he gazed upon the thing.

I knew he measured all the space
Between the lintels and sill;
And well I know he'll come again
Some night when all the winds are still.

IX

Beyond the eastern hills which gave
The sun full-burning to our fields,
Beyond the eastern hills which threw
The stars upon their sudden shields,

It seemed that folk could never live,
So far it was, so far away:
There could be no white houses there,
And barns with lofts of meadow hay.

And now full-neighbored in that land,
I muse in strange and voided rest:
It cannot be that people live
Beyond those hills that front the west.

X

CRICKET

You bring so many, many years
Of marshland, down, and heather!
You bring so many, many tears
To shed in golden weather;—

I would forgive you and forgive
My own sad heart her breaking,
For that you lift again to live
The joys that set me aching.

Yet strangely through this after-light
The sunset leaves in falling,
I look and guess the deeper night
With other voices calling.

XI

We took the meadow for our feet
And walked away an evening hour;
The shadowy grasses were complete
With many a little daisy flower.

So near we knew her breathless wake
The nighthawk drove on slender wing;
And somewhere hidden in the brake
We heard the mellow marsh-wren sing.

The dark came eastward from the wood
In spire and dome and minaret;
It touched our shoes; we understood
What we could never quite forget.

It touched our hearts; we turned to go.
It touched our foreheads and our hair;
And dumbly neither one could know
Why each had brought the other there.

I loved; and you had deep confessed.
There came the sudden evening star;
We looked upon the east and west
And said, "How far, how very far!"

XII

What is the marshland whisper,
And what the pasture croon
When the worms bring up the sweet earth
And spread it in the moon?

Oh — for lovers go a-walking,
And hand and hand they go;
Long they lie, close they lie
By the sweet hedge-row.

What is the garden dreaming
While the dim anemone
Bends wanly at the broken vent
Where the crocus used to be?

Oh — fleet and far is beauty,
And far and far and fleet,
Beyond the brow, the bosom,
And beyond the running feet.

What is the dark earth telling
Where the pine tree and the yew
Grip the ghost within the hillock,
Keep the wild star from the dew?

Oh — for lovers turn to sleeping,
And beauty fails so soon:
The worms bring up the sweet earth
And spread it in the moon.

XIII

You willed it that I take this dust
And sprinkle in the garden close
Your hands, perchance, in the mignonette,
Your heart within the rose.

And so I do your bidding here
Though it must drive me from this place,
Lest I should see in every flower
The beauty of your face.

XIV

When April winds were full of mint
And mellow with the apple trees,
I took our garden path and walked
To view the famed Hesperides.

The golden fruit of heaven hung
Upon the wide boughs of the night;
I saw how beauty lifted up
Could fill a noble space with light.

And then a cloudy sadness came
And loosed the tears beneath my brow;
A little thing it was to reach
The beauty of my orchard bough.

I thrust my palm into the stark
Terrific substance of the sky:
“Take it, O God,” I said, “my gift,
Take it and let me die!”

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Bennett Weaver is engaged in educational and religious work at the Michigan Agricultural College, where he has been a member of the Department of English for several years. He is a native of Wisconsin, and was educated in that state and at the University of Chicago. He has been a frequent contributor to THE MIDLAND for several years, and his work has appeared, also, in a number of other magazines. He is the author of a volume of verse called *The Garden of Seven Trees*.

BRIEF REVIEWS

The Joys and Tribulations of an Editor, by L. FRANK TOOKER. (Century, \$4.) I believe this to be, on the whole, the best book yet written about an American periodical. It is a full-length portrait of *The Century*, born *Scribner's Monthly*. For the past forty years Mr. Tooker has himself been connected with that magazine, and so much of his information comes first-hand. The style is interesting; the matter is important; the book is well made; the illustrations illustrate. What more could one ask? But little; though I for one should have appreciated an appendix of two or three pages giving a list of editors, with the exact limits of their terms of service, and even perhaps a careful bibliographical record of the magazine file: these things for the sake of history. But gratitude for a fine piece of work puts an end to carping. One of Mr. Tooker's most interesting chapters is the one called "Editor vs. Contributor," in which he incorporates various anecdotes illustrating *The Century's* dealing with manuscripts. "I remember the Ghetto-born Berliner, but long a resident of France, who, on viewing certain alterations in his moving little story, shaking his head sadly and slowly, said with deep feeling: 'I wish you would not the blacksmith employ on my watch of great delicacy!'" It is indeed a tender business, this editing of manuscripts.

F. L. M.

Georgian Stories 1924. (Putnam, \$2.50.) This is the second of a series of biennial anthologies of British short stories published by the Putnams. It does not represent the work of the last two years, however, for some of its stories were written several years ago. The editors of the series have undertaken to present some of the best and most representative tales by contemporary Englishmen, and they have now published two attractive and valuable books. Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of these stories is their originality of theme and treatment. I am sorry that the publishers could not keep to the royal octavo size, but I am glad they have retained one of the pleasantest features of the former volume — the portraits of the authors. I hope the series may be continued.

F. L. M.

Blind Raftery, by DONN BYRNE. (Century, \$1.25.) Donn Byrne has given us in this book another charming long-short story as enchantingly Irish as *Messer Marco Polo* was Venetian. Once more we are "uncritically seduced" by the lovely poetry of romance. With blind Raftery, the great poet of Ireland, and Hilaria, his beautiful Spanish wife, we wander through the heather-covered braes, from Galway City to the green-terraced county of Mayo and the purple Connemara Hills. We stop at the drinking-house in the village of Dherran Dhoun, which means the End of the World, and listen to the tale of Dean Swift's escape from the matrimonial ambitions of shameless Queen Anne, and the latest news about the wild speculations in the South Sea Company. Then "bulidled is the leafy house of June" as we sit with Hilaria and her poet, on the black cliffs above the mad Atlantic, admiring the "queen of the harps, itself." And finally after the South Sea Bubble has broken and Dafydd Evans, once the pitiless Welshman of Claregalway, is reduced to beggary we look up to the honey-colored moon and try to remember that this has only been Donn Byrne again writing exquisitely of romantic happenings.

L. F. J.

The Apple of the Eye, by GLENWAY WESCOTT. (The Dial Press, \$2.50.) This is the most significant attempt I have seen toward the employment of a considered and beautiful style in the realistic presentation of middle western life. Mr. Wescott has handled strange and yet utterly veracious material with restraint and dignity. At times his prose seems to me a bit frail and inelastic for his purpose. But for the most part it is signally triumphant, with a simple strength frankly archaic in quality. He has written of the Middle West both beautifully and truly: how rare an achievement! I admire the book deeply, and salute its maker.

J. T. F.

Green Thursday, by JULIA PETERKIN. (Knopf, \$2.50.) This is a book filled with strange and delicate beauty. The present-day plantation negroes who appear in its pages are human beings of extraordinary vividness, and there can be no questioning the veracity of the interpretations. The stories are woven together so that they form a novel, better structurally than many contemporary novels, and infinitely superior in the significance of the material and in the beauty and vividness of the writing.

The Reviewer, in which some of the stories first appeared, is entitled to honor on many counts. But it would have justified its existence if it had done nothing except to introduce Mrs. Peterkin. I count *Green Thursday* one of the most important contributions to our developing regional literature in many a day.

J. T. F.

The Tattooed Countess, by CARL VAN VECHTEN. (Knopf, \$2.50.) I regret to say that I can review only a portion of this book. I have tried three times to read it, each time penetrating a little farther into the thickets of Local Color. But I am finally stopped on page 51, between the "yellow" of a Baltimore oriole and the "scarlet" of a cardinal, and I shall not try again. So far I have found nothing of the lightness and whimsical alertness which characterized *Peter Whiffle*. Is it possible that Mr. Van Vechten has overestimated his versatility? J. T. F.

Some Magazines and Magazine Makers, by JOHN E. DREWRY. (Stratford Co., \$2.) This book is intended chiefly to give information about the contents, management, and history of twenty-five prominent magazines of today. Unfortunately, it is inaccurate to a degree, besides being improperly arranged and frequently ill-written. For the change of title from *The Christian Union* to *The Outlook* two dates are given on page 41—both of them wrong. This is an example of very many errors, many much more important than the one noted. The book is well made, but is valuable only for a number of long quotations.

F. L. M.

Paulus Fy, by HELENE MULLINS and MARIE GALLAGHER. (McBride, \$2.) Confusion and frustration attend upon the way of an esthete, and the path of Paulus Fy was devious and often obscure; but Paulus, uncowed by death, followed to the end of the trail and found himself acclaimed a man after God's own heart. Those who read Miss Mullins' story "Dust" in *The Wave* some months ago will not be unprepared for this Gaelic mixture of real and unreal, which when presented without an audible chuckle is so disconcerting to the prosaic Teutonic temperament.

R. A. T.

